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A Report on a Self-Exploration through Sandplay-Drama Method

—On Aggression and Mother-Daughter Relationship in a Modern Japanese Woman—

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サンドプレイードラマ法を用いた自己探究の一試み —現代日本女性の攻撃性と母娘関係について—

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Abstract: Here, a process of a self-exploration by a middle-aged woman through Sandplay-Drama (SPD) shall be reported. She made six SPD's for three months. Through them, she examined her relation to a controlling mother image, understood anger and aggression inside herself, and found out the way to control them. It was suggested that some themes imposed on her are common to many women and that SPD is useful as a means for self-exploration.

Key words: Sandplay-Drama, aggression, mother-daughter relationship

Objectives

Japanese women were formerly expected to live up to their assigned roll as a housewife and mother. But, in recent years, more and more of them have attained academic careers equal to men and have engaged in social activities as career women, regardless of their being married or unmarried.

This can, of course, be said to be a progressive change. But a social life will be stressful and many Japanese women unavoidably undergo inner conflicts

through it. So, as a result, they are increasingly in needs to reflect newly on their own inner worlds, cope with their own inner conflicts, and then, explore the possibilities to establish their new selves.

The author, as a counselor, has had many opportunities to meet such Japanese women. They didn't need psychiatric cure or intensive psychotherapy. But they were in serious needs for some kind of aids to explore their own selves. To meet these requirements, the author has employed Sandplay-Drama (SPD)^{1) 2)} as an appropriate method.

SPD is an application of sandplay therapy. Sandplay therapy is a kind of well known art therapy. The tools are sand box (72×57×7cm : The inside was painted blue to express water image) and various kinds of

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miniatures. The instruction is "put the miniatures on the sand as you like and compose your world." The kinds and number of miniatures which are used and the time required are not limited as a principle.

SPD is a method in which a client, at first, makes a sandplay and then she composes an imaginative story herself on the photograph of her work. In sandplay therapy, as is known, a client expresses factors in her own unconscious world through visual images in a protected room³⁻⁵⁾. Through this process, the power for self-treatment and self-development is brought about in the client herself. To add drama-composing to this has, according to Kataza¹⁾, the following meanings.

- 1) It is just like the safety device to protect the client from the pressure of unconsciousness.
- 2) The objects, being picked-up, placed and shaped crystallize to form the drama.
- 3) It is the guidepost to reconsider the past and to point to the future.
- 4) It is just like the messenger to the counselor.

While SPD is a very interesting method, it has not been practiced so widely, yet²⁾. So the method itself has the possibility to be sophisticated in the future. Recently, the author judged a client to be a normal woman and to have a rich ability to exercise self-exploration. So the author agreed with her to practice SPD method within the setting of period (3 months) and times (6 times), which was established in advance. These sessions were free of charge and the client readily agreed to offer her works as research materials.

The objectives of this research are to report the aspects and the process of their change

which were found in a Japanese woman's inner world and expressed through SPD method, and to bring out some common themes clearly on that report.

Client

Ms.A, 43 years old, single, a graduate, a public servant.

Ms.A is a woman giving an intelligent and genuine impression. Her colleagues considered her to be very diligent and competent. She appeared to be brisk but she was, in reality, poor at exchanging words with others, couldn't express her feelings by words well, and, as a result, always took on jobs though she had discontent about them.

Recently, a new boss arrived at her workplace. It seems, however, that he was insensitive and unable to show appropriate leadership. He made her workplace confused. Ms.A had been patient with and obedient to even such a boss before but, this time, she couldn't somehow restrain her own anger and got to refute him harshly even in the presence of other colleagues. She was surprised at and perplexed with her own fierceness herself.

In parallel with this, she found herself to feel irritated against her mother, who, as a "devoted good wife and wise mother," tried to keep daughters under her complete control as ever. She hadn't had such a feeling against her mother before.

Ms.A, who faced such inner changes of her own, realized that she had come into middle age and needed to explore her inner world and to discover her new possibilities. So, she decided to try SPD method under the author's aid.

Processes of Sandplay Drama

At every session, Ms.A practiced sandplay under the author's aid, took photographs of the work by digital camera, and brought them home. By the next session, she composed a drama on them. Then she brought a copy of it and discussed it with the author. After that, she practiced the next sandplay. Each session took about an hour. The followings show all of her works.

1. Sandplay 1 (Fig.1)

1) Drama 1. A sorrowful monster

I had been walking through a deep forest for a long time and I couldn't tell how long. I had been watching solely my steps all the time. The path curved roundly and seemed to go endlessly. "I haven't expected that the mountain is so high. I'm tired out....," I sighed. Casually, I looked forward, and I found that there spread out an unexpected view at the foot of the mountain. At the same time, I also found that I had transformed myself into a monster. Now, I couldn't remember what ever I had looked like and how I had appeared to others before. All I knew was that I'm here now with a really ugly figure. Amazed at the situation, the monster stood still. Though it didn't know why, a sorrow occupied it gradually and distorted its face.

Far away off, there seemed to be a place like a sea or a lake which was filled with shining water. Before that, there seemed to stay something horrible, gazing at this side. Must the monster go down to the thing from now? While it strained its eyes for the distant place, it could identify various things. Near the horrible ghost, there were a pretty hut like a cake and an uncanny residence of a similar color to the hut.

Near the pretty hut, the horrible ghost stood, and near the uncanny residence there were a pretty bench and a woman who posed as if bowing on the stage. Near a pretty thing there was a horrible thing, near uncanny thing a pretty woman. Those combinations gave it some strange impression. Before them, it saw rocks shining golden. Among trees on the left hand, a girl stood holding her mouth with hands. What happened to her? Would she tell the monster something?

"If I make for the shining shore, I'll be able to meet something. I feel that I must go and see it. But I can't make steps forward, yet." While the growing sorrow distorting its face as ever, the monster was aware of a black cat near herself and was caught in such a thought.

2) Impressions, associations, and explanations

I wanted to create a distorted space. I intended to have made an exit of a tunnel at first, but there were no tunnel on the shelf. I'm, however, satisfied with the work to some extent.

A rabbit, a child, a woman bound on a chair, a bowing woman, and a monster are the figures which I feel reflect some aspects of myself. A black cat, an owl, and a snake are images of guardians.



Fig. 1 Sandplay 1

In my real life, I can't deal with my aggression appropriately. So far, I couldn't expect myself to protest or object to anybody else at all. But, now, I object to my boss without hesitation. To him, my objection will sound pretty bitter, but I myself think it a just argument, so I have no sense of guilt. However, I feel incompatible with the present myself, and so I'm in self-disgust.

2. Sandplay 2 (Fig.2)

1) Drama 2. Sounds in a mountain

When the monster closed her eyes, she found a rapid stream whirling in her head. She saw a distorted mountain at the center of the whirlpool. And I, that is, the monster strained my ears with my eyes closed, as if I listened to the beats of the mountain. The foot of the mountain wound heavily and cold water surrounded it. The stream was rapid and deep. On the top of the mountain, there was a crystal tower, and now a eagle, which was a guardian spirit of the mountain, was coming down on it. The crystal tower as well as the gem stood clear. But, deep beneath the surface, a red-hot gem was breathing. Straining my ears with my eyes closed, I could hear the sound. While I listened to the sound, I felt giddy but became, somehow, qualm.



Fig. 2 Sandplay 2

2) Impressions, associations, and explanations

My aggression, with which I couldn't deal well, was took up during the conversation, and, as a result, it may have been organized in myself to some extent.

At first, I felt like making a burning mountain, but I buried a red glass marble at the heart of the mountain and that satisfied me. However, it also meant that there still remained a smoldering fire in the mountain. In my real life, while I get angry with my boss, there is also a sense of resignation in myself, that is, I feel nothing will change whatever I may say. On the other hand, I still wonder how I can improve things as I wish. After this sandplay, there were two mornings when I woke up to find myself all in a sweat. Then I felt relieved as if something had gone out of my body, together with sweat.

3. Sandplay 3 (Fig.3)

1) Drama 3. A domain of water

At last, I arrived at the top of a volcano. From there, I saw the world of water and its surroundings. I was, now, a red frog. The opposite side of the lake was "a blue world," which was a silent domain. If I swam across the lake, I could arrive there. But it seemed to me that I needed to cross all of the four bridges around the lake in order to see the real "blue world." However, when I crossed the four bridges, I came back to the starting point. A stone Buddhist image on the boat seemed to be a guardian spirit who would protect me while I crossed the lake, but, at the same time, it seemed never to look over my negligence. I was going to swim across the lake after I crossed all the bridges and went around it. But I was afraid of spiders a little and I was



Fig. 3 Sandplay 3

likely to be attracted by golden rocks. So there seemed to be some points dangerous to me at which those things would prevent me from going ahead. But the goal seemed to be clear to me.

2) Impressions, associations, and explanations

I felt like making a domain of water which seemed to have been appeared with the earth divided into two parts.

I feel the existence of aggression inside me as ever, but, recently, it hasn't come out. Now, I'm trying to express by words what I'm feeling.

Recently, I've often remembered my grandmother. Since my infancy, we were in close relation to each other. I was her favorite. She died of disease when I was nine years old. Though I loved her very much, I didn't shed tears at her death. Since then, I've kept wondering why. The recollection of my grandmother reminded me of some episodes related to my mother. She asked me stealthily which I liked better, my grandmother or her. She forced me to sleep together with my parents and senior sister at night though I had slept with my grandmother before.

My mother was the only real daughter of my grandmother. When she bore me as

her second daughter, my grandmother said to her, "Will you leave her in my care?" Since then she accepted me at any time. In spite of all that, did I betray my grandmother? Wasn't it my mother who led me to do so? Such thoughts drew tears from me.

4. Sandplay 4 (Fig.4)

1) Drama 4. At length...

I (a little girl) got out of the deep water and breathed in deeply. At length, the time was coming to make a landing riding on a snake. There was an uncanny house at the destination. Though the house was quiet, a crow was imprisoned in it and a tank could be seen near it. I couldn't tell how fierce the battle would be. But I couldn't help beginning it. I was going to battle in order to break the spell of that house. I wondered what the world would look like when it was broken? Then a thought occurred to me, "But there is no guarantee that I will win the battle. The spell may not be broken." Wasn't it because I'd already been cast under the enemy's spell that such a thought occurred? Anyway, I was determined to begin the battle.

2) Impressions, associations, and explanations

I used to wonder what others would think



Fig. 4 Sandplay 4

of me if I said such a thing, even when I needed only to explain something in my workplace. Then I used to get mentally tired of thinking before I told it and, after all, I used to do the job myself without telling. But, now, I communicate things related to the work in a more businesslike way than before. I've come to observe myself every day, especially when I get irritated against myself clumsily taking on extra jobs from my boss or colleagues, and so on. Of course, I sometimes fall into self-hatred but, on the other hand, I think that gives me fairly good lessons on life.

On my relationship with my mother. I don't visit my parents' house so frequently as before. My mother doesn't complain about it directly to me but that doesn't mean her changes. She, for instance, uses my niece as a way of controlling me indirectly. I don't want to hear her complaint. And I'll be perplexed if she ceases to be "a mother taking care of her family" and becomes "a weak and sickly mother." So I often follow her control and, so doing, avoid trouble with her. Seeing her, I'm deeply convinced that personality will be really hard to change.

5. Sandplay 5 (Fig.5)

1) Drama 5. Well, at last...

Well, I'd got out at last.

It was not easy to escape the left world covered with trees and I had had to come across various things hiding in inconspicuous places. I had been sometimes defeated. Now, I escaped the world at last, and felt relieved.

I thought the right world was a very comfortable place. I could hear laughter and it's light. I was going to stay there for a



Fig. 5 Sandplay 5

while. I had a hunch that I was going into the left world time and again. Until then, I was going to relax for a while. But, when I got prepared, I was going into the other world. By the way, what was the result of the former battle? Did I get away the world after I won the battle? Or did I retreat because of inferiority in it, and so escaped for the time being?

2) Impressions, associations, and explanations

While I was touching sand, it occurred to me to make a world separated into equal halves. The two worlds were not isolated from each other but connected. That was suggested by a white snake peeping its head out of the left world. The two children laughing with a woman were the images of me. I was often tempted to put a crow. I guess a crow was a symbol of "wisdom," "misunderstandings," and "missionary" to me.

Now, I feel a little sorry for myself that I always put my all ineptly into the relationship to others until I was entirely exhausted. However, I don't think that I will be mature enough to behave tactfully. So I wish I can, at least, spend my energies effectively as the occasion may demand. On the other hand, I've changed my attitude

and am, now, prepared to communicate my thought anyway, whether others accept it or not. I'm envious to see my colleagues give their thoughts confidently. But I think all I can do is to discipline myself in a way satisfiable to me.

6. Sandplay 6 (Fig.6)

1) Drama 6. Departure

There is an area of trees. Though the roots of them should spread and fix the soil there, it is, somehow, unstable. So tetrapods are settled in order to prevent it from sliding. There are many kinds of things such as a car, flowers, various people, snakes and so on. They all caused dearness in me.

The landform, which looks like an island, may be a burial mound. The ground is not hard but the feel in walking on it is not bad. Because it forms a hemisphere, wherever you may start, you will go round and keep walking endlessly. I believe that I will continue a monotonous, ordinary work untiringly and that that will be an everyday life. I said those things cause dearness in me. It might be because they all lie in me. I think all these things here, as a whole, compose me and my everyday life I'm living.

2) Impressions, associations, and explanations

When it occurred to me that this was the



Fig. 6 Sandplay 6

last session, I felt like making a mountain. I wanted to bury something in it. I had buried glass marbles before, but, this time, I buried a red bridge. The work looked like a decorated cake and was pleasant to see. The sight tempted me to add laughing girls, snakes, and a flame on it.

Now, I lead my life accepting various things as they are. As for the aspects of myself which I'm not willing to accept, I'm reconciled to them, half giving up changing. Of course, when I'm touched on them, I got emotional and defiant toward others in spite of myself. Seeing that, I realize that they are in myself as inferiority complex.

Looking back upon my life, I'm deeply convinced that I have been required to do everything well from my mother. I may have been receiving messages that I'm not allowed to do badly. From now, I want to sophisticate my aggression, to deal with my incompleteness, and, through that, to build up a gentle personality.

Discussion

Here, on the six SPD's Ms.A composed, some considerations shall be made on the aspects, themes, and process of change in Ms.A's inner world.

In the SPD 1, the heroine was tired after a long walk on a high mountain's path covered with trees for a long time. The high mountain gives an impression that her ideals and requirements were very high. And the tree's shutting the visibility zero seems to suggest that she still remained under the protection by her mother.

It attracts attention that the heroine transformed herself into an ugly monster. This gives an impression that Ms.A's self-image was deeply injured and was hard to

accept to her. But from another point of view, this image of the monster can be also considered to imply her possibility unknown even to herself. In addition to the monster, her self-image was projected on a rabbit, girls, and a woman. They are all pretty but, at the same time, they also suggest an existence which is powerless, innocent, and repressed. It's also impressive that the monster felt sorrow.

Suddenly, the field of vision opened up and the sight of shining water appeared. An attractive domain of unconsciousness seems to invite her. In order to obtain something necessary to her, she must approach the domain. But, at the same time, in order to approach there, she must meet some things horrible. There seems to be obstacles difficult to deal with. A girl holding her mouth with hands appears to be the heroine's alter ego.

In the SPD 2, a high mountain and a stream united to form a scenery. Does that mean that the domain of consciousness and that of unconsciousness got closer to each other? Inside the mountain a red-hot gem was breathing, which seems to symbolize her anger, passion, and aggression. It will be the heart of the volcano. But her aggression was discussed during the conversation and that led her to bury the gem under the ground and to lay on the surface a tower and gem of cold, clear crystal as charms. Also, a large eagle was laid as a guardian spirit of the whole mountain. Of course, the flame of her aggression didn't go out but remained inside. But through recognition of that, she got, if anything, peace of mind.

In her everyday life, Ms.A got to control the expression of her aggression in her

workplace.

In the SPD 3, the earth was torn and the domain of water appeared. Four bridges were thrown over it. When she crossed all of them, she couldn't get into the domain but only go around the lake. The domain of water was hard to approach but she made up her mind to do that.

In those days, Ms.A recalled her poor grandmother. She was her grandmother's favorite since her infancy. But her mother, who was a real daughter of her grandmother, tore her and her grandmother. There existed a triangle among them. Her sense of guilt that she betrayed her grandmother and her anger with her mother for causing her to do that were too hard for the infant Ms. A to become conscious of, and so she will have repressed them. Ms.A's grandfather died young and her father was so busy at work that he was almost always away from home. Ms.A's family can be said to have been an actual matrilineal family. So her mother, as a central figure of her family, was devoted herself to bringing up daughters and tried to control or handle them like her alter ego. That will have been a quite natural emotion for her. Such a type of mother is a traditional "good wife and wise mother" and no one can disobey her passionate energy.

Such a relationship between a mother and a daughter is a very common one and many studies were already made about it⁶⁻¹⁰⁾. However, for each individual, it is indeed her own theme how she become independent of her mother. A daughter who was brought up under her mother's protection and plentiful love cannot help feeling guilty about becoming independent against her

mother's will. It is because she believes that her mother will suffer from isolation after she has left. Also, if she is always sent a message from her mother that she cannot do anything without mother's support, she cannot help remaining by her mother. That is a psychological spellbinding which a daughter cannot escape, whether she becomes a career woman or gets married and bears a child.

In the SPD 4, the heroine, who had been exploring her unconscious world, began fighting resolutely in order to break a spell of "the uncanny house" (that is, the problem of her family). She transformed herself into a brave girl riding on a snake. Her animus in her inner world will have begun acting. But she was not confident to win the battle, yet. However, it seems that her resolution to fight had, anyway, importance at that time.

In her everyday life, Ms.A didn't begin a tangible battle against her mother. She realized her mother's personality and intended to handle it. This is her prudence and can be said to be wisdom of an middle-aged.

She said that, in her workplace, she came to distinguish her personal emotions and her business and to assert herself in the latter in a more businesslike way than before.

In the SPD 5, the heroine got out of the left world symbolizing her inner world into the right one symbolizing her outside one. She decided to live in the latter world for a while, which was bright and open. Her inner conflict took a short break.

However, the result of the battle was still unknown. She had a hunch that she needed to go into the left world several times in

the future. And the important thing is her awareness that the two worlds were not separated from but connected to each other. Needless to say, the inner maturity is required for a person to be active in the society and the accumulation of social experience is indispensable to inner maturity.

Ms.A felt inclined to grow in her workplace in a way characteristic of her without being attracted by her various types of colleagues.

In the SPD 6, a large mountain (an island or a burial mound) was made at the center. On it, a plentiful of various things were laid, and a red bridge was buried inside.

Ms.A, moved with some dearness at all of these things laid there, said that they were all the expressions of her self-image. They seems to be too miscellaneous and messy. However, Ms.A decided to accept all of them as her own and to make much of her monotonous and circular everyday life. And she hoped to develop a personality which has not only various aspects but also elegance not through eliminating her aggression but through sophisticating it. Here, a series of sessions of her SPD came to an end.

Though it was within a short term and a limited number of times, Ms.A explored her own inner world through SPD. And she tackled intensively the theme as to how she could free herself, psychologically, from the controlling mother image. We could guess that, without the medium of SPD, such development would have been impossible. Thus the validity of SPD was confirmed.

The theme which appeared in Ms.A's SPD's can be said to be a common and important

one that is now imposed on many Japanese women. Anger and aggression are usually very troublesome and dangerous. But they are also the source of energy for a inner change. They are, as it were, double-edged swords. It will be an urgent theme how they sophisticate and utilize these swords efficiently.

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